

One University's Attempt to Name the Franciscan Charism in Higher Education¹

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Abstract

This paper was originally written to help colleagues at the University of Saint Francis to understand the concept of the Franciscan charism, a goal integral to part of our Strategic Plan in 2002. Many staff and faculty questioned why the Strategic Planning Steering Committee chose such a word for the core of its vision for the institution. Through the revision process of that plan, we have come to a greater understanding of the richness of the Franciscan charism. This paper is offered as a model to help colleagues at other institutions understand this tradition.

Meaning of the Franciscan Charism

Is it possible to convey a succinct description of the Franciscan charism that captures its essence? The following is my attempt:

The Franciscan charism is the gift given by God to Francis and then passed on to all who attempt to live in the Franciscan tradition. The charism encompasses the ability to relate, with utter respect, to all creation—especially human persons—since God's revelation to Francis included the insight that everything and everyone that exists is given by God through Christ, God's first creation. This charism is a stimulus to peace-making and service for all who live and work in the Franciscan tradition.

In the context of higher education, the concept of *charism* is often a misunderstood word. In the New Testament, the Greek word *charis* is used repeatedly and, when translated by the English word *grace*, comes to

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¹ A modified version of this article first appeared in the *The AFCU Journal: A Franciscan Perspective in Higher Education* 5(1). Full permissions have been granted for publication in the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education*.

denote the “totality by which (humans) are made righteous”²: “For if, by the transgression of one person, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one person Jesus Christ.”³

In the New Testament, *charis* is *grace*: God’s great gift of our justification. In a Franciscan institution of higher education, we recognize that the gift of which we speak was originally given by God to Saint Francis, and we know that this gift is still available to us through the tradition. This paper describes the charism given to Francis and how this gift is connected with educators who carry out their work in this tradition.

The Franciscan Charism

Attempting to capture the full meaning of the Franciscan charism is ambitious. Though volumes have been written on the subject, there is no *single* component that stands out as central. However, a number of ideas are essential to understanding what God called Francis to do in the world. Throughout the writings about Francis, his gifts, or charisms, were always explained as being from God. The Franciscan charism includes the following dimensions: recognition of the primacy of Christ, reverence for all creation, respect for the dignity of the human person, community, peace-making, service, compassion, poverty, and simplicity. Each of these will be presented in the sections below and will be linked to the higher education context.

Primacy of Christ

The Franciscan charism is first of all *Christian*: Christ is at the center of Francis’ life, yet never isolated from God the Father and the Spirit. For Francis, the God who creates is the Trinitarian God who is in relationship with us.⁴ The following words, which come from a letter to his brothers, are typical of Francis: “I decided to offer you in this

² John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1965), 325.

³ Rom 5:17.

⁴ Kenan B. Osborn, O.F.M., “The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: Tracing Its Origins and Identifying Its Central Components,” *The Franciscan Heritage Series*, Vol. 1 (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2003), 55-56.

letter and message the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Word of the Father, and the words of the Holy Spirit, which *are spirit and life*.”⁵ Imitation of Jesus consumed Francis and, at the end of his life, led to the stigmata, the experience of Jesus’ wounds in his own body. During his life, Francis expressed his simple desire to imitate the life of Christ through radical poverty, through the proclamation of the Gospel, and through the celebration of earthly events such as the portrayal of the Christmas story with real humans and animals in a cave in Greccio.

Shortly after the death of Francis, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, a thirteenth century scholastic theologian, was the first Franciscan to expound a theology that could be called *Christocentric*. Bonaventure was aware that Jesus’ coming did provide a remedy for sin, but “the Incarnation is willed for its own sake and not for the sake of any lesser sin . . . Sin is not the primary reason for the Incarnation; rather, love is.”⁶ John Duns Scotus, a Franciscan theologian second only to Bonaventure, also wrote in the thirteenth century. John Duns Scotus held that God intended the Son to become human—the Incarnate—in order to be King and center of the universe. According to Scotus, Jesus would have become human to unite creation to God more intimately, regardless of the sin committed by the first humans. “Scotus asks pointedly: Does Christ’s predestination to grace and glory, and consequently to his position as end of all creatures beneath him, depend on the permission of sin?”⁷ Scotus’ answer was a definite *No*; redemption is not the primary reason for Christ assuming human nature. This is Scotus’ position of the *Primacy of Christ*: He, with Bonaventure, developed this tradition of *Franciscan Christocentrism* where Jesus is the first of all created beings. The New Testament Letter to the Colossians stresses this pre-eminence of Christ as God’s agent in the creation of all things:

⁵ Francis of Assisi, “Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance,” in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. 1 The Saint*, ed. Regis Armstrong, et al. (New York: New City Press, 1999), 45.

⁶ Ilia Delio, O.S.F., *Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to His Life, Thought, and Writings* (New York: New City Press, 2001), 92.

⁷ Allen B. Wolter, “John Duns Scotus on the Primacy and Personality of Christ,” in *Franciscan Christology*, ed. Damian McElrath (St. Bonaventure NY, Franciscan Institute Publications, 1980), 141.

He is the image of the invisible God,
 the firstborn of all creation.
 For in him were created all things in heaven
 and on earth, the visible and the invisible.⁸

Reverence for Creation

Reverence for God's creation is another central element in the Franciscan charism. The bird shown perched on Francis' shoulder in works of art is but a small symbol of the overwhelming awe that he experienced for all of creation. Later, Franciscan writers would tie this awe back to his reverence for Christ: Jesus' union with all creation through his Incarnation led to Francis' profound reverence for all of creation. Francis provides an example of this in his *Canticle of the Creatures*, where he writes of Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Wind and Sister Water, even Sister Bodily Death.^{8a} Thus seen, all creation is considered as being in a relationship with Francis and with us.

To show his reverence for Creation, Francis did not merely write the *Canticle of the Creatures*;^{8b} praise of Creation was also his way of life. As the words of *The Divine Office of Saint Francis* express:

He bade us praise as praise he did,
 For praise was ever on his lips,
 The praise of his dear Savior;
 And he invited bird and beast
 And every other creature, too,
 To praise their Lord and Maker.⁹

Even though Francis and his generation did not have the urgency in regard to the *environment* that faces us today, there is no doubt that he would have been at the forefront of the present ecological movement. In fact, he is called the patron saint of the environment. Here we have the foundation of a value stressed by most Franciscan universities and colleges: respect for creation.

⁸ Col 1:15-16.

^{8a} Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle of the Creatures," in *Armstrong, Vol I*, 113-114.

^{8b} Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle of the Creatures," in *Armstrong, Vol I*, 113-114.

⁹ Francis of Assisi, "The Office of the Passion," in *Armstrong, Vol I*, 338.

Dignity of the Human Person

Of first importance in creation is the *human person*; this is the point of connection between God and creation. Francis lived in an age when philosophy and theology underestimated the value of the body. Although he treated his own body mercilessly, he came at the end of his life to realize that this was not necessary and that his body had served him well as the vehicle through which he experienced the created gifts of God. It was in his body, as well as his soul, that he experienced his most intimate union with God: the stigmata.

Also, even though Francis called his followers to great holiness of life and observance of poverty, he allowed for the full expression of human life. Francis experienced part of this human life through friendship. He had brothers who were close to him as friends; Brother Leo and Brother Juniper were constant companions. Francis also embraced relationships with others who were not intimate friends, showing respect for the dignity of all. Although originally repulsed by the sight of the leper, Francis' conversion was hastened when he chose to embrace the leper. Francis never wavered from his reverence of others, especially persons who were excluded. He expected that his brothers would lead a life of conversion but was compassionate with those who sometimes found the life difficult. When, during a time of fasting, a brother cried out in hunger during the night, Francis brought bread and, eating first, shared a meal with him. For Francis, charity was more important than fasting.¹⁰

Francis also showed his respect for all persons by designating his order as the Order of Friars Minor or the Order of Lesser Brothers. In contrast to the monastic establishments of the medieval period, Francis had no levels of status within his community: all were treated as equals. Those brothers who were placed in governance of the communities were known as *ministers*, from the Latin, *to serve*. Additionally, he showed great respect for others during interactions with those outside the community. When Francis went to meet the Sultan Malek al-Kamil at Damietta in Egypt during the Crusades, people feared that he would never leave the Sultan's camp alive. Francis was, in fact, treated harshly by the Sultan's guards who beat and insulted him. However, the Sultan received Francis with respect and, after speaking together, both men realized that neither had need to *convert* the other: both knew the true God. They spent as many as twenty days together sharing ideas,

¹⁰ Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, "The Major Legend of Saint Francis," in *Francis of Assisi: Vol II: The Founder*, ed. Armstrong, et al., (New York: New City Press, 2000), 565.

and when Francis left, Malek al-Kamil attempted to shower him with gifts. When the Sultan realized that Francis would accept none of his worldly offerings, his esteem for Francis grew. The two men parted, not changed in their beliefs, but with heightened respect for each other.¹¹ The high respect which Francis had for each human being, which flowed from Christ's love for him, gives meaning to another value shared by Franciscan institutions: reverence for the unique dignity of each person. It also gives us a model for what most Franciscan institutions strive to achieve: growth in *diversity* and respect for all the unique cultures among us.

Community

Community is another Franciscan charism. Although his followers lived, not in monasteries as did most religious communities of the day, but in the world among the poor, Francis recognized the importance of having his followers live in community with one another. He gathered his brothers together regularly for chapters (meetings), the most famous of which was the Pentecost Chapter of Mats in 1217 where about 5,000 friars gathered, having only rush-mats for shelter.¹² He knew that his new group needed to pray together, to share the experiences of their missions, and to be renewed. Even those living in hermitages, which were the exception to the ordinary Franciscan way of life, were required to have supportive companions. Building community through true relationships is essential for all Franciscan colleges and universities.

Peace-making

Peace-making is a necessary component of the Franciscan charism. Francis experienced in his own life the devastating effects of violence and conflict. Francis rejected violence and came to be known as a peacemaker. The Peace Prayer attributed to Francis, but traceable to the early twentieth century, contains a full prescription for a peace-filled way of life. Francis was aware of the struggle to maintain peace in one's heart.

A servant of God cannot know how much patience and humility he has within himself as long as he is content. When the time comes, however, when those who should make him content do the opposite, he has as much patience and humility as he has at that time and no more.¹³

¹¹ Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis" in *Armstrong, Vol I*, 231.

¹² Anonymous, "The Little Flowers of Saint Francis" in *Francis of Assisi: Vol III: The Prophet*, ed. Armstrong (New York: New City Press, 2001), 596.

¹³ Francis of Assisi, "The Admonitions," in *Armstrong Vol I*, 134.

Service

Service is an element often mentioned as being distinctively Franciscan. The concept most often appears in Francis' writings when he is speaking of the *ministers*, the leaders of the community. In his *Rule*, when speaking of electing the person who will lead the entire order, Francis states:

If, at any time, it appears . . . that the aforesaid general minister is not qualified for the service and general welfare of the brothers, let the aforesaid brothers, to whom the election is committed, be bound to elect another as custodian in the name of the Lord.¹⁴

Not only the ministers, but all Franciscans, were called to be of service to others, following the example of Francis, who never hesitated to give away his food and clothing to a person in need. His own version of the Golden Rule was "Blessed is the person who supports his neighbor in his weakness as he would want to be supported were he in a similar situation."¹⁵ Service, along with peace-making, is a hallmark of the Franciscan charism, and thus should be a hallmark of our higher education institutions.

Compassion

Francis' sense of *compassion* for all suffering creatures underlay his drive to give service. He was compassionate because he had experienced the great compassion of God. His *joy* was often exhibited at times most of us would find difficult. For example, when Francis instructed his brothers to rejoice while they were begging, he noted, "And you ought to go begging more willingly and with more joyful hearts than someone who is offering a hundred silver pieces in exchange for a single penny, since you are offering the love of God to those from whom you seek alms."¹⁶

Poverty and Simplicity

Francis was blessed with the vision to see that his calling was to found a group, which would live in *poverty* and *simplicity* and yet, paradoxically, possess the whole world. In the richly allegorical *The Sacred*

¹⁴ Francis of Assisi, "The Later Rule 1223," in *Adm Vol I*, ed. Armstrong (New York: New City Press, 1999), 104.

¹⁵ Francis of Assisi, "Admonitions," in *Adm XVII, Vol II*, ed. Armstrong, 134.

¹⁶ Anonymous, "The Assisi Compilation," in *Francis of Assisi, Vol II*, 151.

Exchange between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty,¹⁷ written in the thirteenth century, Francis' vision is explained through a conversation between Francis, his brothers, and Lady Poverty. Francis and the brothers share with the Lady their great simplicity of life. Lady Poverty asks for a pillow to rest after their long conversation; they give her a stone. "After enjoying a very quiet and healthy sleep, she quickly arose and asked to be shown the enclosure (cloister). Taking her to a certain hill, they showed her all the world they could see and said: 'This, Lady, is our enclosure.'"¹⁸ All of God's creation is the dwelling and concern of Franciscans.

Franciscan Colleges and Universities and the Franciscan Charism

Franciscan teachers have been involved in university education since the beginning of the university system in Europe. Franciscan studia (general houses of study) for educating Franciscan theologians were established by 1240 in Paris and Oxford. Later these theologians taught in Paris, Oxford, Cologne, Bologna, and other major universities. In the thirteenth century, the Franciscans posed a challenge to the bishops and priests who had been in control of the universities. Franciscans were not limited to specific dioceses and were popular with the laity because of certain privileges they believed the order had received from the Pope. The Franciscans saw themselves as having a more universal mission, reaching even into non-Christian lands. Although they were criticized for their itinerancy (i.e., moving from place to place) and their mendicancy (i.e., living without fixed sources of income), these qualities made them popular teachers and prominent in the development of the university system. Though the phenomenon of Franciscans in university education is not a novel idea for the twenty-first century, its thirteenth-century origins went counter to traditions, challenging the Church order of that time and irritating many of the bishops and priests in whose areas they were teaching.¹⁹

¹⁷ Anonymous, "The Sacred Exchange between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty," in *Francis of Assisi, Vol I*, (New York: New City Press, 1999) 553.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ William Short, O.F.M., "Shapers of the Tradition: Bonaventure and Scotus" in *Spirit and Life: a Journal of Contemporary Franciscanism: Vol 2. The Franciscan Charism in Higher Education*, ed. R. McKelvie (1992), 52-53.

In our present-day society, a Franciscan university should live out the Franciscan charism in unique ways. Considering Francis's love for all of creation, *all of it* is fit subject for study in such a university. There is nothing in God's creation that is *un-Franciscan*. Franciscans have been eminent scientists, artists, philosophers, theologians, and scholars in almost all disciplines, and their universities should exemplify a similar broadness of scope.

Franciscans in Science

The presence of Franciscans in science began in the thirteenth century with the friars in the English Franciscan Tradition. Robert Grosseteste, a lecturer in the Franciscan school at Oxford, was considered the founder of scientific thought in the medieval period, while Roger Bacon, influenced by Grosseteste, was ahead of his time in regarding the experimental sciences as the basis of medical science, a view not held by most other scholars, including some friars even though the experimental sciences were beginning to be seen as the basis of medicine. This English tradition also produced such thinkers as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. This tradition continues in many Franciscan universities today, like Siena College in Loudonville, NY, and Marian University in Indianapolis, IN, among others, which have outstanding programs in basic science; these programs often include environmental science, a way of bringing Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures* into relevance for our age. Concern for the environment has been the special focus of many Franciscans, including Keith Warner, O.F.M. of the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, and Ilia Delio, O.S.F. of the Washington Theological Union. Some members of the Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities (AFCU) have student groups dedicated to care for the environment.

Franciscans and the Arts

Franciscans have been involved in arts from the beginning. The Franciscan devotion to the arts actually began with Francis himself as is shown in the *Canticle of the Creatures* and his other prayers. In poetry, the *Dies Irae* of the Requiem Mass was probably composed by Thomas of Celano, the friar who was Francis' contemporary and famous biographer. Jacopone da Todi, a thirteenth century friar, composed the *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* shortly after the time of Francis. In addition, the visual arts were influenced by the life and teachings of Francis as is

evidenced by the frescoes by Cimabue and Giotto on the walls of the Basilica of Saint Francis, and by other artistic works produced throughout Italy, such as those in Santa Croce in Florence. In the words of Pope Leo XIII, “We owe to the mind of Francis that a certain breath and inspiration nobler than human has stirred up the minds of our countrymen so that, in reproducing his deeds in painting, poetry, and sculpture, emulation has stirred the industry of the greatest artists.”²⁰ Today, that tradition is carried out in most Franciscan universities, one of which is the University of Saint Francis in Indiana. It has a nationally accredited school [National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD)] and many of its creative projects embody the values Francis preached in his ministry. Examples include art projects devoted to the HIV-AIDS epidemic, dramatic presentations including “Dead Man Walking,” and the stimulus to begin the “Feed the Fort” project in which food is collected for local food banks.

Franciscans in Theology and Philosophy

The contributions of Franciscan theologians and philosophers are too many to mention here. The thoughts of Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and John Duns Scotus, whose teachings concerning Christ and redemption were discussed in the earlier part of this paper, epitomize these Franciscans’ contributions. The study of theology and philosophy remains critical in the Franciscan university milieu, but not in a conventional manner, which separates them from other disciplines. Zachary Hayes urges that the study of theology should deal with crucial questions in today’s world, dialoguing with the sciences and with world religions.²¹ Prominent today in the study of theology and the Franciscan tradition are two institutions: St. Bonaventure University houses the Franciscan Institute, a world renowned resource for the history, spirituality, and intellectual life of the Franciscan movement; and the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, CA, part of a consortium of schools of theology, is “committed to embodying Franciscan theology in a religiously and culturally diverse world.”²² Scholars from both of these

²⁰ Pope Leo XIII, *Auspicato concessum*, Encyclical on Saint Francis, Sept 17, 1882, n.22. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_17091882_auspicato-concessum_en.html.

²¹ Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., “Reflections on a Franciscan University,” in *Spirit and Life: A Journal of Contemporary Franciscanism*, 1992, 104.

²² Franciscan School of Theology, “Our Theological Vision,” <http://www.fst.edu/aboutFST/vision.html>.

institutions have made vital contributions to the understanding of the Franciscan intellectual tradition.

Curricula in General

Since the Franciscan charism embraces the totality of God's creation, Franciscan institutions need not justify venturing into any area of study. Zachary Hayes sees this as flowing from the dignity of humans who are related both to God and to all of creation.²³ Since all of creation is the subject matter of Franciscan education, we should see it in a holistic way, acknowledging the relationships that exist in creation. This gives us an unlimited curriculum, a curriculum that should be rigorous, giving to each element of study the dignity which belongs to it.

A corollary of the above is that interdisciplinary learning should be encouraged. Creation is a unique whole, and segregating its study into unrelated parts does it a disservice. Interdisciplinary education can be one facet of a healthy community of learners. Learning at Franciscan universities should take place within the community that is created not only in the classrooms, but also in the liturgical, social, residential, and service life of the university. The strength of the community undergirds much of the life of the university; unconnected individuals, each seeking their own growth, will contribute less to the whole than if they become part of a community.

One major support for the integration of the Franciscan intellectual tradition into the curriculum has been the Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities (AFCU). In 2004, the association began the publication of *The AFCU Journal: A Franciscan Perspective in Higher Education*. In addition to articles about the tradition, this journal contains shorter articles of "best practices" for incorporating the tradition into the curriculum. This venture has been enhanced by the AFCU Symposium, a biennial meeting of administrators, faculty, and staff from AFCU institutions. In 2010, the theme will center on care for the environment ("Creating New Verses for the Canticle of the Creatures"), but time will also be devoted to ways of incorporating the Franciscan tradition into all areas of the curriculum.

In 2001, the English-speaking Conference, Order of Friars Minor, established the Commission for the Retrieval of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition (CFIT). Its purpose was to identify the

²³ Hayes, "Reflections on a Franciscan University," in *Spirit and Life*, 104.

major themes of this tradition for use by Franciscan leaders and teachers; to encourage collaboration between major centers of Franciscan research; to articulate this tradition for the purpose of evangelization and education of more scholars, especially among the laity; and, in general, to make the tradition available in a variety of venues to Franciscans in the English-speaking world. They have, to this point, produced texts on the Franciscan intellectual tradition itself, as well as on creation, the human person, the San Damiano Cross, the Gospel of John, and the Trinity. This venture has been a great support to those working in Franciscan ministry of any type, but especially to those in higher education.

While stressing that any Catholic university must be clear about its Catholic identity and mission, and provide courses in Catholic theology, *Ex corde Ecclesiae* acknowledges the academic freedom of the faculty to explore issues in their areas of expertise.²⁴ For Franciscans, part of this exploration is to examine the connection between the entire universe and its Creator. Brother Ed Coughlin explores the ideas produced by Saint Bonaventure in the thirteenth century (in *Reductione Artium ad Theologiam*) in connection with the current Church teaching in *Ex corde*:

The task, therefore, of bringing the Gospel into dialogue with the various disciplines in the academy is one of the reasons why Franciscans were initially involved in university life and may give insight into why they have been continually involved in the ministry of education in a variety of ways. It is also one of the fundamental reasons why they should continue to be involved in education today.²⁵

Co-curricular Programs

The vision of Francis and Clare, when considered through the lens of this history of the Franciscan tradition in the universities, should lead to certain practical outcomes beyond the scope of a traditionally defined curriculum. The Incarnational vision of Francis—seeing Christ as the supreme creation—should lead students educated in Franciscan colleges and universities to be persons of service and peace-making, both during their formal education and in their lives. Faculty and staff should actively model this behavior. In some Franciscan institutions,

²⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1990), sec. 2, ¶2.

²⁵ F. Edward Coughlin, O.F.M. “Does a Mission Statement Make a Difference,” in *Spirit and Life*, 89.

this is accomplished by means of “centers,” such as the Center for Ethics and Leadership at Alvernia (PA) and Viterbo University’s (WI) D.B. Reinhart Institute for Ethics in Leadership. Increasingly, Franciscan institutions are setting up offices of civic engagement and service learning. The Holleran Center for Community Engagement at Alvernia and the Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy at Siena College (NY) both address issues of Catholic social teaching and justice. Franciscan University (OH) titles their office “Works of Mercy,” which includes a variety of outreach services. Marian University (IN) has a program for students entitled “San Damiano Scholars,” a program of commitment for students who see that their future holds a life in ministry or other volunteer church leadership. Service learning and other forms of civic engagement should flow from the all-encompassing scope of Franciscan education and Francis and Clare’s love for all of God’s creation, especially human persons.²⁶

Conclusions

Although written twenty years ago, Coughlin’s advice to leaders in Franciscan colleges and universities remains relevant today. He encourages leaders in Franciscan institutions to:

evaluate how systematically, simultaneously and experientially they are addressing the demands of a quality education in the Christian and Franciscan tradition, and whether it is an education which invites each and everyone to be conscious of their dignity, awakens their desire to search for truth while remaining open to the fount of all truth, and asks everyone to be responsible for the ways in which they use their gifts and capacity to care not only for themselves but *for the sake of others*. In this way[,] everyone within the institution or in relationship to it will be invited into a relational experience.²⁷

Coughlin ends by quoting Saint Bonaventure, whose words capture much about the true nature of Franciscan education. In this quotation, Bonaventure is speaking of the true nature of contemplation, the highest form of all learning. He prays that the one who studies will *not* believe that:

²⁶ Limitations of time and space made it impossible to reflect the programs and offerings of all Franciscan institutions. What is offered is merely a sample.

²⁷ Coughlin, 1995.

reading is sufficient without unction,
speculation without devotion,
investigation without wonder,
observation without joy,
work without piety,
knowledge without love,
understanding without humility,
endeavor without divine grace.²⁸

The Franciscan charism is multifaceted. Akin to the philosophical dilemma of trying to find the meanings of “good,” “beauty,” “justice,” and “truth,” a person knows when he or she has experienced the charism in the lives of those who truly live it, but an actual definition remains unattainable. Likewise, as Franciscans, we can offer opportunities to learn about the theological tradition in its more technical sense, and this we ought to do. However, if that tradition is not revealed in the activities of the university and the lives of community members, it will never be seen, felt, heard, or sensed. And yet, that is what students, professors, administrators, visitors, and members of our larger community must experience when they come to our campuses.

²⁸ Bonaventure of Bagnoregio as quoted in Coughlin, 1995.